



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 117th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 167

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2021

No. 157

House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 14, 2021, at 11 a.m.

Senate

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2021

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable MAZIE K. HIRONO, a Senator from the State of Hawaii.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, who soars on the wind and stabilizes us through the challenges of life, we worship You. You remain the source for all our blessings. Your daily mercies prompt us to praise Your Name. Lord, You forgive our disobedience and clear our record of guilt.

Today, use our lawmakers for Your glory. Guide them along the best path for their lives as You fill them with Your peace. Lord, as they depend on You for each decision, surround them with Your unfailing love. Give us all pure hearts so that we may serve You with honor.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, September 13, 2021.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable MAZIE K. HIRONO, a Senator from the State of Hawaii, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Ms. HIRONO thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, first, I want to welcome back all of my colleagues from the August work period. As we return to Washington, as everyone knows, the Senate has a very busy schedule ahead of it.

On the nominations front, we will begin this week by holding a cloture vote on James Kvaal to be the Under Secretary of Education. Tomorrow, we will move the nominations of David Estudillo to be district judge of the Western District of Washington, Angel

Kelly to serve as district judge for the District of Massachusetts, and the Senate will also begin consideration of Veronica Rossman to be the circuit judge for the Tenth Circuit.

On the legislative front, the Senate will pick up exactly where we left off last month. We will continue our fight to preserve voting rights for millions of Americans, and, of course, we will continue working to pass President Biden's Build Back Better agenda and set our country on a path to prosperity for decades to come.

At the end of last work period, the Senate took two important steps to achieving that goal. First, we passed the bipartisan \$1 trillion infrastructure bill that will make historic investments in our Nation's physical infrastructure.

Second, Senate Democrats came together to pass a budget resolution with reconciliation instructions that will clear the way to pass a reconciliation bill with historic and transformative investments in American jobs, American families, and the fight against climate change.

Over the August State work period, I remained in constant communication with the chairs of the Senate's relevant committees, as well as with the Speaker and the White House, including the President. I am pleased to say we have made substantial progress in translating provisions of the budget resolution into policies we can pass into law.

As we continue our work over the next few weeks, I want to take a step back and explain why this legislation is so important.

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



Printed on recycled paper.

S6439

For far too long, millions of American families have worried that the American dream has increasingly fallen out of reach. Too many in the middle class are just struggling to stay there. Too many who are trying to get to the middle class find the ladder up steeper and steeper.

Today, the cost of raising a family, saving for college and retirement, getting a good-paying job and affording healthcare have become very, very hard. As a result, that sunny American optimism, so key to our national identity, has been replaced by a growing sourness and divisiveness in the land. We have to do better, and we will do better.

With this legislation, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rebuild our economy and rekindle faith in America's future. It will include the largest tax cut for the middle class in a generation. It will include provisions that are both critically important and overwhelmingly popular with the American people, from strengthening childcare and education to making healthcare more affordable for millions. And, crucially, it will include unprecedented steps to fight the climate crisis and preserve our planet for the next generation.

After yet another summer marked by hurricanes, floods, and wildfires, we cannot hold off on taking action any longer. The world is looking to us for leadership on climate change. By achieving the emissions goals Democrats are laying out, we can reassert America's leadership.

And through it all, we are going to make sure that this bill is paid for and that those at the very top finally pay their fair share.

When this Senate majority began its work many months ago, our original task was to pass legislation that would get our country out of the depths of the COVID pandemic. Now, the legislation we will work on over the next 2 weeks will lay a new foundation for the future of our economy. It will restore the middle class in the 21st century and give many more Americans the opportunity to get there. Building ladders to middle class—that is what this is about, and that is what we are going to do.

The next few weeks will be crucial to achieving this goal, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to continue to deliver on our promise of big, bold change for the American people.

Of course, even as we work to deliver on our Build Back Better agenda, the House and Senate will also work on other important priorities that demand immediate attention, including passing a continuing resolution before the September 30 expiration of government funding, providing emergency funding to help those devastated by recent natural disasters, and helping resettle our Afghan allies and partners. I expect all of this to be done in a bipartisan and timely way.

Of course, over the next few weeks, the House and Senate must also come

together to address the debt ceiling. In America, when it is time to pay the bills, we follow through on our obligations, without exception. For a long time, addressing the debt ceiling was considered a routine and responsible step that both sides worked together to achieve. Even when President Trump was in office, Democrats worked three times with Republicans to suspend the debt ceiling because it was the right and obvious thing to do. We didn't pick excuses and say: Here is why we don't want to do it. We knew it was important and it was time to lay aside differences and move it forward.

But now, unfortunately, some of our Republican colleagues—even though they were eager to have Democrats support them when President Trump was President—now some of our Republican colleagues are reportedly contemplating a reckless idea, spearheaded by the Republican Senator from Wisconsin, to oppose any effort to raise the debt ceiling whatsoever. And, unfortunately and sadly, the Republican leader seems to be going along.

Let me be clear: taking the debt hostage and playing games with the full faith and credit of the United States is reckless, irresponsible, and will harm every single American. It is a complete nonstarter.

This is not just another political debate. It is about honoring our unbroken commitment to pay our debts and avoid another financial crisis at a crucial moment for our country.

Now it is important to remember that this is not about green-lighting future spending. This is about paying debt from past spending, which was incurred during the Trump administration and which received favorable votes from the majority of Republicans and Democrats.

Indeed, it is a new study that came out. According to the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service, the Trump administration incurred \$5.4 trillion in new debt after the debt ceiling was raised in 2019, up through his last day of office. So all of the new \$5 trillion in debt, bottom line, was caused under the Trump administration, not by Democratic spending—under the Trump administration, \$5.4 trillion from the last day the debt ceiling was raised in 2019 to the last day of Trump being in office.

Another report by the Treasury Department further states that, over the entirety of the Trump administration, that figure rose to as high as \$8 trillion.

Again, let me repeat this so my Republican colleagues hear it loud and clear. This is not about the Democrats incurring debt. Between the last time that the debt ceiling was raised in 2019 and the final day of the Trump administration—nothing to do with Biden or Democrats or anything in 2021—his administration added more than \$5 trillion to the national debt; and over the 4 years of Donald Trump, new debt totaled as much as \$8 trillion.

So both sides—both sides—have a responsibility to pay our bills. Both sides, led by the Republican Senate, incurred much of this new debt. Senators from both parties voted overwhelmingly in support of the many laws that contributed to this obligation.

In the middle of the COVID pandemic, the Congress came together under Donald Trump, when Donald Trump was President, to pass successive COVID relief laws, like the CARES Act, the PPP extension, and the "908 COVID deal" in December. Democrats and Republicans voted in huge numbers in support of these laws. Republicans voted to make these expenditures.

Now we must come together to do the responsible thing and pay those bills. Leader MCCONNELL assured the country in 2019, when Donald Trump was President, that we would "no doubt [raise the debt ceiling] on a bipartisan basis." Again, that is what McConnell said when Trump was President: We will "no doubt [raise the debt ceiling] on a bipartisan basis." He said, when Trump was President, failure to do so would be a "disaster."

Failure to do so now, Leader MCCONNELL, is an equal disaster. It doesn't matter who is President. We still incurred the bills. So I believe it should be no different this time around.

The United States has never, ever, defaulted on its debt. I can't imagine Republicans would want to be responsible for the first-ever default. We need to work together to raise the debt ceiling and avoid causing irreparable harm to our economy, still recovering from the devastation of the pandemic.

I would say to the business community and the financial community, let Leader MCCONNELL know, stop playing games with the debt ceiling.

VOTING RIGHTS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, now on one final issue, on voting. Before the Senate concluded the previous work period, Republicans blocked multiple efforts to even debate voting rights legislation in the U.S. Senate.

Let me be clear: Republicans refusing to support anything on voting rights is not an excuse for Democrats to do nothing.

Over the recess, a number of my colleagues and I, including Senators KLOBUCHAR, MERKLEY, WARNOCK, MANCHIN, PADILLA, KAINE, KING, and TESTER, worked diligently to craft a revised voting rights piece of legislation.

This compromise proposal would protect the freedom to vote, end partisan gerrymandering, stop the scourge of dark money in our politics, among many other good things.

I applaud my colleagues for their hard work and their progress to come together with a very strong voting rights bill that all Democrats can support, while respecting the role of States and promoting greater confidence in our democracy.

Now Senator MANCHIN has been having discussions with our Republican